

## Fact Sheet

### Class Size Reduction in California (June 2002)

#### The Legislation

- Passed in July 1996 (SB 1777); accompanied by a reading initiative. Purpose: to improve student achievement in the primary grades.
- Initial investment of \$1 billion, followed by annual investments of approximately \$1.5 billion. Thought to be the largest state education reform in U.S. history.
- Offers schools \$850 per student (initially \$650), with yearly incremental increases, for every K-3 student in a class of 20 or fewer
- Required that schools lower first grade first, then second, then third and/or kindergarten.

#### Prompting Factors

- **Poor reading scores.** NAEP testing results released in 1995 showed California's 4th grade reading scores in second-to-last place among 40 participating states and jurisdictions.
- **Bulging classrooms.** A task force attributed part of the blame to class sizes that averaged among the highest in the nation.
- **Promising research on CSR's effects.** Tennessee's Project STAR concluded that CSR has a positive effect on student achievement, particularly for low-income and minority students.
- **Shift from recession to economic boom.** The end of the recession in California resulted in a surge in state revenues. State law required that the schools receive a large proportion of that gain. The decision to earmark the funds for CSR was partly research-based, partly political.

#### Implementation Issues

- **Rapid pace.** In the end of the first year (1996-97) 88% of first-grade students were in reduced classes along with 57% of second graders. By the end of the 2000-01 school year, the program included over 98% of first- and second-grade students and 95% of kindergarten and third graders. Implementation lagged, however, for schools with high percentages of minority (especially Hispanic) and low-income students.
- **Teaching supply and quality squeeze.** Prompted hiring of 28,500 teachers in 3 years; 29% had less than 3 years experience. Now 13% of all California teachers are not fully credentialed, though the gap in credentialed teachers between schools with the highest and lowest percentage of low-income students is roughly 16%.
- **Facility problems.** Not enough classroom space for number of 20:1 classes created. Schools took space from special education, childcare centers, music/arts programs, computer labs, and libraries and/or purchased portable classrooms.
- **Equity concerns.** Per-student funding is same for all, though most-crowded districts incurred higher costs and had to dig into own coffers. Urban schools struggle hardest to find qualified teachers and classroom space. Concerns that students who stand to benefit most—low-income and minority children—may be least likely to get the opportunity.